

#YALICHAT on Volunteerism and Civic Leadership

When you're willing to volunteer your time, smarts, and energy, how do you make sure your efforts have the maximum impact?


Jeff Franco is vice president and executive director of City Year Washington, DC, a nonprofit organization whose teams of young adults commit to a year of full-time service keeping students in school and on track to graduate. Since joining the organization in 2008, he has quadrupled the number of students and schools served and more than doubled the organization's fundraising capacity. He's also a YALI Network Online Course Instructor! Take his class ["Attracting and Motivating Volunteers"](#) or ["Inspiring Community Participation."](#)

Jeff held a #YALICHAT on [Facebook](#) about the benefits of volunteering and how to motivate those around you to get involved.

Read highlights below:



What are the Benefits of Service to a Greater Cause?

It is service to a cause greater than oneself that inspires the greatest form of leadership.  Serving each other is in our genetic makeup. We are meant to take the time to give back to our communities, despite the common misperception that life is only about getting what is owed to you. Service doesn't have to be a choice between acting in one's own self-interest and acting in the best interests of others, because giving back can be as fulfilling and enriching for the volunteer as for the community that receives the extra help.

Some of the benefits that volunteerism provides are straightforward, such as resume and network building. Yet, many of the benefits of volunteering are immeasurable. When I volunteer, I feel joy

and fulfillment. I grow in my own abilities and skill sets. I learn about the world around me and about the ways that I can help to work for justice in my community. I am enriched by each relationship that I create along the way, and I have fun meeting other like-minded people who may have grown up in a completely different community from my own.

Now more than ever, communities are realizing the impact of volunteer experience on developing well-rounded citizens. Many high schools and colleges in America require students to commit a certain number of community-service hours prior to graduation. Employers in America find candidates to be more attractive when they have volunteer activities on their resumes. Our AmeriCorps volunteers at City Year find more job opportunities and grow their professional networks after committing their hours of service with us. For our AmeriCorps volunteers, serving with City Year is often the catalyst that leads them into careers in teaching, public policy, other nonprofits, or law firms. There is no limit to how much our national service organization opens doors for our young idealists.

At City Year, we believe that the youth of our communities carry the idealism, the energy and the unique solutions to face the challenges that face our society. As an organization, City Year's vision is that one day the most commonly asked question of a young person will be: "Where are you going to do your service year?" Think of how much it would change our societies if our young people were expected to complete one year of direct service to their communities as a rite of passage into the working world. The future of our communities rests on the shoulders of those who are willing to voluntarily make the world a better place. If we are not happy with our communities, then it is our obligation to do something positive to change them.

In my upcoming #YALICHAT, I welcome questions on the benefits of volunteerism in a community, on how to inspire community participation, and on motivating and attracting volunteers toward a cause.

Jeff Franco is vice president and executive director of City Year Washington, DC, a nonprofit organization whose teams of diverse young adults commit to a year of full-time service keeping students in school and on track to graduate. Since joining the organization in 2008, he has quadrupled the number of students and schools served, doubled the size of the staff and more than doubled the organization's fundraising capacity. He has led the development and implementation of a strategic plan that will again grow City Year Washington, DC's size and impact to reach at least half of the students who drop out of school in Washington.

Conservation: Good for the Economy, Good for the Future

Mantoa Moiloa (Courtesy of Mantoa 
Moiloa)

Up in the highest nature reserve in Africa accessible by motor vehicle, Mantoa Moiloa teaches people how to take care of the land and the animals and plants living on it.

“My passion for my country influenced my decision in a career,” says the 33-year-old Lesotho park manager and 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow. “I want to protect the beauty of the Mountain Kingdom for future generations.”


Moiloa manages the Bokong Nature Reserve, one of the Lesotho Northern Parks in the southern African country. It’s a position that has helped her understand that conservation and business have close ties. Lesotho “boasts” of its areas’ natural beauty, she exclaims. “We are bound to conserve our natural environment so as to keep our tourism business going,” she adds.

Moiloa holds a bachelor’s degree in technology in ecotourism management from Tshwane University of Technology. She recently transferred to Bokong from the Liphofung Cave cultural and historical site nearby.

The conservationist works on many fronts to protect her country’s natural resources. She helps Lesotho’s community conservation groups identify and approve infrastructure restoration projects. She is involved with conservation awareness campaigns and helps law enforcement officers in efforts to stop illegal wildlife poaching.

While most of Lesotho’s most beautiful but fragile lands are protected by the government, Moiloa would like to see public officials establish an independent body to manage those areas and the country’s budding ecotourism industry. That body could reach out to international partners to help it identify other areas in the country deserving of national protection and conduct environmental impact assessments of proposed development projects, she says. It also could develop local and international marketing campaigns to entice visitors to Lesotho, touting the country’s geography and wildlife.

Moiloa says ecotourism can benefit Lesotho’s citizens economically. Job-creating businesses include those that sell handicrafts made by people living in the area; guide horseback-riding, hiking and bicycling tours to remote areas; offer cultural performances; and provide meals and overnight accommodations at lodges, in homes and at camps.

A lion rests in a protected park area of 
Lesotho. (Courtesy of Mantoa Moiloa)

Moiloa says environmentally friendly businesses can help make conservation a nationwide behavior, encouraging employees to use at home the same resource-saving practices they use at work. Such businesses “help the sustainable use of natural resources, conserving them for the next generation,” she says.

Moiloa says one way people can protect their natural surroundings is to adopt environmentally friendly lifestyles. That means doing things like recycling paper and glass products, reusing shopping bags, composting organic matter for garden fertilizer, using only the amount of water

needed, not discharging pollutants into the air or water, and hunting and fishing legally.

So far, Moilola, originally from Botha-Bothe, says that “only people in the communities near natural protected areas are aware of environmentally friendly ways of living.”

Long-term, Moilola hopes that all Lesotho schools will teach students about the environment and conservation — lessons that are easily learned at a young age, she notes.

She urges other YALI Network members to do their part for conservation by pledging to plant at least one tree a year. “Let’s use our resources sustainably,” she implores. “The legacy of your grandchildren is in your hands.”


Childhood Illness Inspires Nigerian to Malaria Action

Oluwamayowa Salu, a YALI Network member from Nigeria, founded the Iba [Yoruba word for malaria] Eradication Foundation and organizes malaria prevention and education efforts in Lagos and the surrounding areas.

“Malaria kills and we need to stop it.”

Sub-Saharan Africa suffers more cases of malaria each year than any other world region, mostly among children under 5 years of age, according to the World Health Organization. However, the toll of malaria is on the decline and deaths in the region are down almost 50 percent. Work of groups such as the Iba Eradication Foundation are key to that decline.

Oluwamayowa Salu shares his experiences and advice for other young leaders interested in starting similar disease-prevention campaigns in this interview.

A World Malaria Day program in Lagos  featured a bed net distribution. Pictured are Lagos U.S. Consul General Jeffery Hawkins, USCG Lagos’ Deepa Sipes, Oluwamayowa Salu, and Ojosipe Bimbo. Photo courtesy O. Salu.

Question: Why are you interested in malaria prevention?

Salu: I grew up in one of the dirtiest places in Lagos — the commercial capital of Nigeria — called Bariga. It’s mostly swampy, and this definitely meant lots of mosquitoes [the carriers of the disease-causing parasite].

My elder brother and I used to hide under a tattered mosquito net, but I still ended up with malaria again and again. I landed in hospitals many times to be treated for malaria instead of being in school. I lost some of my primary school years.


Because of this experience, I grew up saying I would do something about malaria, thus I founded my organization. I am awestruck to find out later that malaria kills a child every second. I am a lucky one to have survived the disease.

Q: How did you get the Iba Eradication Foundation started?

I started with material support from some organizations and I used my very small salary to support my organization till I gained some traction and recognition. I wrote proposals and letters to Exxon Mobil, Lagos State health agencies, Red Cross International and so many others. Our awards and seed grants also helped us move forward.

To implement our projects, we have worked in many communities and partner with the local nongovernmental organizations, youth associations and community development organizations. So we get lots of volunteers from there and we have been able to build a huge database. We also make use of social media to recruit volunteers.

Q: The Iba Foundation has distributed insecticide-treated bed nets, a key measure to avoid nighttime mosquito bites, which can cause infection. How do Lagos citizens adapt to bed nets?

Keeping a neighborhood clean and  eliminating mosquito breeding places is a key part of the malaria eradication strategy.
Photo courtesy O. Salu.

Salu: There are some difficulties in the use of bed nets. This stems from the average size of a Lagos family, and the size of the house they inhabit. About four or five people might sleep in one room, so it becomes very inconvenient and difficult to use these nets. We have large-size nets, but using them may mean poor ventilation. Then, with Nigeria's power problem, there is often no electricity to power the fans for air circulation. So people prefer to sleep without the nets and bear the consequences.

Some people believe malaria is already part of our DNA, so there is no use sleeping under the nets. If you fall ill once every three or six months, that is the way of life. You walk into a pharmacy and buy some drugs to treat the illness. Many Nigerians believe that curing malaria is easier than preventing malaria.

But bed nets are only one of the methods of preventing mosquito bites. Convincing people to adopt these practices depends on using many behavioral communication tools.

We discovered lots of people muddle things up about malaria. Because of the very sharp rise in use of smartphones, we decided to create apps that can educate, inform and communicate behavioral change to people. Apps can be downloaded and accessed by anybody, anywhere, so they are faster than the use of pamphlets or town hall meetings. I have seen lots of malaria mobile apps developed by young people, and I have even developed one.

Comic books are another information tool we are working on. Children are the age group most affected, but I found that local education curriculum offers just two or three lines about mosquitoes and malaria. That is very bad.

With comics, you can create a generation that knows what to do and that will grow up with the right information about the disease. At Iba Foundation, our first malaria comic book publication will be in English language but our aim is to have it translated in many languages. Nigeria has over 250 tribes, and other sub-Saharan African countries are affected by the disease, so our work is well cut out for us. We will do it.

Q: How can other members of the YALI network become involved in disease-prevention education?

Salu: We need to innovate beyond use of bed nets. Malaria kills, and we need to stop it. I have read about what young people all over Africa are doing about educating people about malaria, but I think the very first step is to educate people about keeping the environment sparkling, spotlessly clean, and eliminating the conditions that allow mosquitoes to breed. This is why environmental sanitation is central to our malaria eradication efforts.

Q: How have you seen bed net distribution and other educational activities improve practices and reduce disease in Lagos?

Salu: Bed net distribution has really reduced the disease drastically. Through the support of organizations like the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Exxon Mobil's Malaria Initiative, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership and a working synergy between local government and NGOs, bed net distribution has reached lots of low-income families, and villages too.

For example, I have slept under a mosquito net every night for years now, and I have also helped distribute them through my organization to thousands of people. Malaria is becoming history for bed net users like me. We also collect data before and after our net distribution programs, and the impact has been remarkable. We did some research after one campaign and found that our educational programs helped reduce the number of malaria cases in one community by 45 percent.

Q: Do you find other young adults like yourself are generally aware of malaria prevention techniques, or do more YALI Network members need to help spread the message?

Salu: I am knowledgeable about malaria because it has affected me and I am passionate about ending it, but a lot of people are still very ignorant on how to avoid it. Some believe not staying under the sun, not overworking and avoiding eating bad food will reduce possibility of getting malaria, but those things are not true.

We definitely need more YALI Network members to spread the message, and we will be glad to incorporate interested YALI Network members into it.

At Iba Foundation, we are already looking at forming a youth malaria alliance all over sub-Saharan Africa. We know there are young people all over the sub-Saharan African region who have been affected by the disease in one way or the other and are very passionate to end it. We know young people have ideas and innovations to implement locally that could "fast-track" eradication of the

disease. The alliance could offer them a platform to develop those ideas. We are hoping to start small and spread out, with support from both local and foreign organizations, of course.
